

Brookhaven Town Closes, Condemns "Sober Home" in Middle Island

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Building Found "Unfit for Human Habitation"

Farmingville, NY - Brookhaven Supervisor Ed Romaine announced that Town investigators closed a "sober home" in Middle Island today, condemning the building as "unfit for human occupancy" and removing the 11 individuals living there.

Town building inspectors and fire marshals responded to a complaint at 62 West Bartlett Road, where they found a one-family home inhabited by 11 adults. The house is operated as a "sober house," with most or all of the residents placed by the Suffolk County Department of Social Services. Part of the basement was converted to two rooms of living space that lacked openings for emergency escape and rescue. Three persons were living in the basement. There were no operating smoke detectors and no carbon monoxide detectors present.

"For years, unscrupulous landlords have masqueraded as 'Sober Home' operators in an effort to make money, instead of making a difference in the lives of those who are seeking help and rehabilitation. These unregulated homes have plagued our communities, diminishing the quality of life for neighbors and threatening the health and safety of those living there," said Supervisor Romaine. "Closing this house today will help to improve the quality of life for the residents of this community, and allow the people who were living there to have the type of housing they deserve, and hopefully access the kind of services they need."

The house was condemned under the Property Maintenance Code of New York State as an Unsafe Structure (no operating smoke or carbon monoxide detectors or Certificate of Occupancy, no emergency escape in basement), Unfit for Human Occupancy (dangerous and unsafe because of the aforementioned), and an Unlawful Structure (basement converted without a permit). Numerous violations were issued against the owner of the building, and the house was placarded as condemned.

The Suffolk County Department of Social Services was called to inform them that the residents were being removed from the unsafe premises and would need new housing. The residents present were given emergency housing information, and the emergency housing information was posted on the house as well.

Earlier this year, Supervisor Romaine and the Town Board unanimously approved a Home Rule message in support of legislation authored by New York State Senator Lee Zeldin to certify, assist, improve and monitor sober living homes operating in Suffolk County. The bill (S.4697/A.6791) would establish rules and regulations necessary for the certification and operation of all sober living homes located within Suffolk County. The legislation states that all sober living homes will be inspected prior to certification and during the pendency of their certification, and operate in accordance with all federal, state, and local building codes. Operating certificates can be revoked and operators can be fined if a sober living home ceases to meet the standards established through this legislation. Any owner operating a sober living home without proper certification would be fined \$10,000.

"Senator Zeldin's bill is much-needed legislation that would address the problem of sober homes that plague some of our communities," said Supervisor Romaine. "People deserve to live in clean, safe communities, not taxpayer-subsidized lawlessness that frequently stems from these overcrowded homes. Hopefully, the state legislature will pass this legislation into law so that these homes will finally be regulated by New York State and Suffolk County."

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